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| Date | Wednesday 21 April 2021 |
| Time | 1.30pm – 4pm |
| Location | MS Teams |
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| Present | Sukhy Johal (Chair), Fiona Allan, Sarah Brigham, Pawlet Brookes, Pippa Frith, Ayub Khan, Jennifer McKie, Cllr Diana Meale, Cllr John Reynolds, Lara Ratnaraja, Cllr Piara Singh Clair, Gary Topp  Rebecca Blackman, Mark Done, Sue Elwell, Simon Fitch, Darren Henley, Abid Hussain, Hugh James, Kelly Johnson, Liz Johnson, Sharon Joinson, Sarah Kennedy Peter Knott, Harinder Matharu, Natalie Querol, Toby Norman-Wright |
| Apologies  Observer | Cllr Abi Brown, Kathy Fawcett, Tanya Raabe-Webber  Caitlin Drew, Officer, Advocacy & Communications, Midlands |
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**Notes**

**Midlands Area Council Meeting**

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|  | WELCOME AND APOLOGIES  1.1 The Chair welcomed Council Members and Management Team to the meeting.  1.2 Apologies were noted as above.  1.3 The Chair welcomed Natalie Querol, Senior Project Manager, Place, to the meeting and Caitlin Drew, Officer, Advocacy & Communications, Midlands as an observer. |
|  | DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST  2.1 Members were asked to check their declarations of interest register circulated at the meeting. Members are required to keep their declarations up to date and a copy of the register will be available at all meetings.  2.2 Members were asked to particularly declare any interests at the point in the agenda when the risk register is discussed. |
| 3. | **AREA RESPONSE TO DELIVERY PLAN**  3.3 Peter Knott reminded members of the investment principles and the national themes of the three year delivery plan and members noted that this was an opportunity for them to focus on the places and the people that matter to the Arts Council the most  3.4 Peter went on to suggest that the key points of focus for the Midlands should be   * **Priority Places** – when they are published, we will detail what our bespoke approach will be in each place * **Diversity** – our commitment and what to build on from the last 10 years of commitment to diversity * **Innovation** – we want to ensure that we contribute to recovery through entrepreneurial approaches   3.5 Rebecca Blackman then outlined the headlines of the methodology and indicators used for identifying places showing need and opportunity. Peter also drew attention to the Midlands Towns Fund Cultural Projects Summary and Tracker that Kathy Fawcett had produced showing the granular level of intelligence we have on places, which also informs identifying where opportunity is  3.6 Members noted the methodology that Arts Council England is using to identify priority places and they also acknowledged the testing process being developed to equip Area Council members with a solid understanding of the process  3.7 Members were invited to discuss and agree the proposal. During discussion, members identified key points for further consideration  **Priority Places**  Cllr Diane Meale declared an interest in Mansfield  Cllr John Reynolds declared an interest in Wolverhampton and Black Country   * Was the balance between East & West Midlands, Urban and Rural, and Diversity correct.? Peter explained that Arts Council England doesn’t currently invest at the same scale as in other places in the areas in the proposal and he drew attention to the other two prongs of the approach to working in place * We will continue to work with large NPOs in the larger Local Authorities, encouraging them to look to increase their engagement in locales currently underserved * What is meant by ‘investment’ in ‘where investment is low’? Low engagement could be interpreted as low cultural production due to barriers on reaching a certain level of work. * The huge difference between disadvantage and discrimination should be recognised. * How will people feel about being recognised as a priority place of low cultural engagement? * How do we avoid organisations parachuting into these places and start taking over and not allowing the place to develop in the way they want to? * Gaze is a dominant gaze and not a diverse one. More consideration needs to be given to some of the groupings as the priority places may not see it in the way it is intended. Peter agreed to discuss this further in a separate meeting.   1. Natalie Querol thanked members for their feedback and addressed some of their observations. She explained that * When we talk about places of low investment & engagement, we are looking at places that are **BOTH**. Natalie explained that pockets of deprivation are looked at within Local Authority levels, as it is currently not possible to acquire robust data at a more granular level. She agreed it was not ideal and agreed to work closely with Area Councils & Area Management Teams on how we use the data * Rebecca emphasised that places, and the people in those places, will be EMPOWERING the community to say what they want to see and participate in.   1. A member commented that local authorities were getting different investment announcements from Government and would welcome a read across to ensure consistency. The prospect and benefits of aligning the priority place with adjacent areas was suggested.   3.10 Rebecca confirmed that an attempt was being made to find ways where we might align / work together / make best value.  3.11 Rebecca re-iterated Peter’s comment that the proposed places are not the only places we will be working in and that we will continue investing in other areas through the existing funding programmes.  3.12 A member said that their Local Authority had started to show considerable output and achievement following their recent ERF funding but that the City had been severely impacted upon by Covid. They requested that there should be some opportunity to build on the investment already made. They acknowledged that that opportunity may come during forthcoming NPO discussions.  3.13 A member said we must recognise that communities (within areas) are not the same across the board and that thought should be given to how we implement this proposal in different areas of the Midlands. They commented that visitors using the excellent cultural assets in the Midlands are not always local but travel from outer areas.  3.14 A member commented that capacity has been lost in the sector and it has become harder for people to have a voice and asked if that could be bought in to the thinking? Rebecca agreed that co-creation is essential to the delivery plan and there will be a combination of approaches but with community voice at its heart.  3.15 A member thought that a strategy on how we pull all of the intelligence and data about neighbourhoods, city centres, suburbs etc together is missing from paper  3.16 Sukhy requested that the proposal underlines the places where investment will have impact.  **Diversity**  3.17 Members agreed that diversity should feature as a key area of focus and should be positioned in a positive way. A competitive advantage and the reputation of the Midlands should be inextricably linked to our policy while recognising we have long way to go.  **Innovation**  3.18 Members felt that exploring the impact of Covid-19 on the arts & culture sector needs to focus on our cultural assets.  3.19 Members agreed that having a manageable set of priority places and enabling communities and organisations to grow and evolve with the help of our investment is required.  3.20 Broadly, members agreed with the three key points of focus for the Midlands and it was agreed that innovation, how it is measured and how we support organisations with lower investment could be explored further at a future meeting. They thanked colleagues for all the work that has gone into this proposal.  3.21 Sukhy re-iterated the organisation’s deep commitment to diversity in the Midlands and a looked forward to having a longer conversation during the NPO round. |
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| **4.** | **MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 15 FEBRUARY AND MATTERS ARISING**  4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February were agreed as an accurate record.   * 1. There were no matters arising. |
| **5.** | **AREA DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE**  5.1 Peter and Rebecca spoke to the Executive Director’s report which included updates on the Cultural Recovery Fund 2, Music Education Hubs, Government place based funds. Members were invited to ask questions.  5.2 Members offered their thanks and gratitude to staff on delivering the investment and they noted that data analysis will be published, led by the DCMS.  5.3 A member commented that although welcome, the Music Education Hub funding announcement was so late it ‘landed’ difficultly. They thought the sector may feel a bit threatened by the content and encouraged colleagues to work with all hubs to embrace the change despite the short funding settlement time. Members were also mindful of staff at the MEHs and job security.  5.4 Members noted the challenge of timescales surrounding applications and that staff are working very hard to ensure we take every opportunity to distribute funds. Area Teams will now be able to undertake core business while the newly established CRF3 team is dealing with CRF3.  5.5 Members received the Area Director’s report which included updates on the Midlands details of the Cultural Recovery Fund 2, Thriving Communities Fund, Coventry City of Culture, Artist update and staffing news.  5.6 Members noted the positive media coverage that lasted for a longer period of time and thanks was given to Sharon Joinson and the Midlands Communications Team.  5.7 Ayub Khan declared an interest in Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Area Council reviewed the top four organisations on the Midlands Risk Register who show a significant risk to either Arts Council’s investment or governance. |
| **6.** | **Chair’s Update**  6.1 Sukhy asked members to noted that he was not going to be quite as available as usual for the next 6 to 9 months as he is working on assessment panel as part of his role at Lincoln University.  6.2 Future agenda item will be to continue the discussion on Priority Places. |
| **7.** | **Any Other Business**   * 1. There was no other business. |
| **8.** | **Dates of future meetings**  **2021**   * Friday 4 June * Wednesday 1 September * Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 November – National and Area Council conference - tbc * Wednesday 1 December   **2022**   * Wednesday 16 February |